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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 003866

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SUBJECT: TAIWAN'S "NON-PARTISAN" PARTY: FLASH IN THE PAN OR
KEY BROKER IN POST-ELECTION LANDSCAPE?

REF: TAIPEI 03796

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reason 1.4 (B/D)

1. (C) Summary: Taiwan's newest and fifth largest party, the Non-Partisan Solidarity Union (NPSU), is facing an uphill battle to eke out enough seats this election to remain a viable political force in the post-December Legislative Yuan (LY). The NPSU will have to exceed the expectation of most pundits and polls, which are projecting only five to seven seats, to obtain the eight seat minimum threshold for a party to form a caucus in the LY. Nevertheless, even without enough seats for a caucus, the NPSU may emerge as a key power-broker in Taiwan's post-election landscape if either the Pan-Blue or the Pan-Green are a few seats short of a majority and the NPSU manages to hold its fragile cohesion in the face of intense lobbying targeted at individual members that is likely to come from both camps. End Summary.

A "Non-Partisan" Party or a Collection of Self-Interests?

2. (C) The NPSU is headed by Chang Po-ya, former Health and Interior Minister, and was formed in June of this year by a motley crew of eleven independent lawmakers who previously had formed a "non-partisan" caucus in the LY. The NPSU legislative agenda focuses on livelihood issues, such as education, worker training, and economic development, and takes what NPSU Chairwoman Chang said is a "neutral" stance on national security issues, such as the arms procurement legislation. (Note: In fact members of the NPSU generally support the purchase plan, but at reduced levels.) Chairwoman Chang told AIT on December 3 that the NPSU seeks to hold the middle ground in Taiwan politics, looking after the interests of Taiwan's people and working with both the Pan-Blue and Pan-Green camps.

3. (C) Playing "non-partisan" politics, however, is probably more difficult for the NPSU than Chang portrays. One major challenge is the fact that many NPSU legislators and candidates are ex-members of the mainstream parties and continue to have ties and share ideological positions with their former colleagues. Former KMT (Lin Bing-kun, Lu Hsin-min, and Lin Ming-yi), People First Party (Chen Cheng-sheng and Chiu Chuang-liang), and Democratic Progressive Party (Cheng Yu-cheng and Chu Hsing-yu) politicians, a good number of whom were expelled from their parties for violating ethics regulations, comprise the backbone of the NPSU membership. Cheng Yu-cheng, for example, told AIT on November 30 that on major issues of importance he votes with the Greens if the NPSU does not take a Pan-Green position. Cheng added that the NPSU party headquarters strategy is often hijacked by the self-interest of the legislators themselves, who joined together into a caucus, and later a party, mainly to acquire the ability to sit on drafting committees in order to expand their bargaining power to further their individual agendas.

Election Challenge: Staying Alive

4. (C) The NPSU is facing an uphill battle to win the eight seat minimum that LY regulations require for the formation of a party caucus, which would boost its ability to be a major player in the post-election legislature. Twenty-six candidates, including nine incumbents, are running under the NPSU banner in districts throughout the island. Chairwoman Chang and NPSU Secretary-General J.J. Chen projected an optimistic figure of ten seats, but conceded that currently only five to six candidates -- the former independents Yen Ching-piao, Chen Chin-ding, Cai Hao, May Chin, and Walisi Beilin, and former KMT legislator Lin Ping-kun (Penghu County) -- look strong. Secretary-General Chen said former PFP legislator Chiu Chuang-liang (running in Taoyuan County), former PFP member Chen Cheng-sheng (Nantou County), and former KMT failed candidate Lin Ming-yi (Yunlin County) have a chance of surging ahead in the final week to grab a seat in their districts.

5. (C) Despite optimism from the NPSU party leadership, NPSU party candidates on the borderline, especially those with former party affiliations, are unlikely to win through. With a party establishment that appears weak on policy cohesion,

financial support, and campaign coordination, NPSU candidates are left to rely on their own local bases of support and to campaign on their own issues, a point which both Chairwoman Chang and NPSU Secretary-General Chen conceded. Cheng Yu-cheng in Taipei County, for example, is essentially running his campaign as a Pan-Green candidate and makes little, if any, reference to his NPSU party membership. Both pollsters and pundits AIT has consulted project that at best the NPSU will win between five to seven seats. DPP Survey Center Director Pan I-hsuan told AIT on December 2 that support for many NPSU candidates, especially the incumbents who were originally elected as KMT, PFP, or DPP party members, is shifting back to the major parties as election day nears and voters are calculating that they need to give a majority to either the Pan-Blue or Pan-Green. Chang and Chen's statement that only former independents (vice partisans) appear secure of winning seats implicitly echoes Pan's assessment.
Post-Election Power-Broker?

16. (C) The NPSU, even if it does not win the minimum number of seats needed for a caucus, will nevertheless attempt to play off the Pan-Blue and Pan-Green camps in order to establish itself as a power broker in post-election politics.

If one side falls a few seats short of a majority, the NPSU leadership clearly expects to be wooed and said it would be in a position to recruit more independents into the party. Chairwoman Chang, while declining to acknowledge what, if any deal, is already being arranged, hinted that the NPSU would seek to make "arrangements" that served the best interests of the Taiwan people. Secretary-General Chen was more forthcoming and admitted that his party would be looking for a cabinet-level position, such as Interior Minister, for its Chairwoman. NPSU legislator Cheng Yu-Cheng told AIT that the NPSU was already talking with the Pan-Green to secure the Vice-Presidency of the Legislative Yuan in exchange for lending its support to the Pan-Green coalition, although he was unwilling to speculate on which legislator the NPSU would put forward for the Vice-Presidency. National Security Council Secretary-General Chiou I-jen separately suggested a similar arrangement (Reftel).

17. (C) Any attempt by the NPSU to bargain for concessions from the Pan-Green or Pan-Blue camps, however, is likely to be compromised to some extent by the loose cohesion and discipline of its individual members. Secretary-General Chen in his discussion with AIT emphasized that post-election negotiations needed to be conducted at the party-to-party level, rather than with the individual members, indicating that NPSU leadership is worried that its members can be bought-off one-by-one.

Comment: Hanging Together, or Separately Hanging

18. (C) The NPSU and its precursor, the "non-partisan" caucus in the LY, have yet to play a major role in Taiwan politics. While its leadership proclaims to take the high ground and not play partisan politics, the party has so far provided little more than vague livelihood-related campaign issues and themes that their own candidates have largely failed to take to heart. Yet, Chairwoman Chang and General-Secretary Chen clearly believe that if neither camp emerges with a legislative majority this week, the NPSU will find itself occupying prime political real-estate. The key challenge for NPSU leadership will be to convince its legislators that maintaining party cohesion will more fully satiate their self-interests than individually selling out to the highest bidder. If the leadership fails to do so, the NPSU is unlikely to become a power-broker in the new LY.
PAAL